NORTH CAROLINA

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United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
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The Honorable Cyrus R. Vance
Secretary of State
2201 C Street
Washington, D. C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The United States government has demonstrated its ability to react swiftly in a humanitarian way to the tragic events in Guyana. Personnel of the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and the U.S. Army who participated in the awesome task of returning the bodies of the suicide-murder victims to the United States deserve to be congratulated for their performance.

Nevertheless, many of my constituents have been deeply disturbed by the apparent lack of authority for the United States government to act as it did. They are appalled at the reported $10 million cost to the U.S. taxpayers, and wonder why other obvious alternatives, such as burial or cremation in Guyana, were not chosen. Unlike persons caught in natural disasters, the residents of Jonestown went there of their own volition and chose to make their lives there. It has been made clear that this group was disenchanted with the United States -- and, indeed, that their ultimate destination was the Soviet Union. In any event, the evidence clearly suggests that they specifically rejected the land and society of their birth. Therefore, I am asking the following questions:

1) What is the policy of the U.S. government with regard to the return home of the bodies of ordinary citizens who die abroad, whether by murder, suicide, or natural causes? Are such bodies returned without a guarantee of costs from the next-of-kin?

2) What statutory authority does the United States government have to act as it did in the Jonesville case?

3) What has been the cost to date, and from what account have the funds been drawn?

4) What is the projected unrecovered cost yet to be expended?

5) Will the Jonesville case set a precedent for altering U.S. policy for the return of the bodies of other U.S. citizens who die abroad? Are guidelines being written?

6) In the light of reports that assets of the Peoples Temple may amount to more than $10 million, what steps are being taken for the recovery of costs to the United States government?

I would appreciate specific answers to each of these questions so that I can respond properly to my constituents.

Sincerely,

Jesse Helms

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